

Message Text

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FM AMCONSUL ASMARA

TO AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

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C O N F I D E N T I A L ASMARA 525

E. O. 11652 : GDS

TAGS : PGOV, PINT, ET

SUBJ : ERITREA : FEDERATION OR INDEPENDENCE

REF : ADDIS 7216

1. IN RECENT DAYS I HAVE DISCUSSED WITH 3 SOURCES (2 MUSLIMS, 1 CHRISTIAN) THE PROSPECTS FOR FEDERATION IN ERITREA. ONE OF THE MUSLIMS IS AN IEG OFFICIAL, THE OTHER A RELIGIOUS LEADER. THE CHRISTIAN, A BUSINESSMAN, IS THE SON OF A PROMINENT FIGURE IN PRIOR FEDERATION.

2. THE CONSENSUS, WITH VARIATIONS, IS THAT FEDERATION AS PRACTICED BEFORE WILL NOT SUCCEED NOW. (A) THE CHRISTIAN THOUGHT THAT PRESENT DISCUSSIONS WERE A FACADE. HE THOUGHT OLDER GENERATION WOULD ACCEPT FEDERATION WITH MORE AUTONOMY THAN PREVIOUS ONE, BUT THAT YOUTH WANTED INDEPENDENCE. HE THOUGHT THAT MILITARY WOULD OPPOSE FEDERATION, AND WOULD PREFER A "FREE HAND" TO SOLVE PROBLEM. HE BELIEVES SHUM AREI WAS KILLED BECAUSE HE SUPPORTED FEDERATION. HE THINKS SHEIK ALAMEIN HAS BEEN PROPOSED AS ONE OF TWO DEP GOVGEN UNDER FEDERATION. HE BELIEVES FEDERATION WOULD HAVE A CHANCE IF IT INCLUDED FREE ELECTIONS AND FISCAL AUTONOMY (I.E., REVENUES FROM PORTS). (B) THE MUSLIM RELIGIOUS LEADER THOUGHT THAT ANY SOLUTION IS COMPLICATED BY SPLIT BETWEEN ELF/PLF. WHILE
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ELF WANTS INDEPENDENCE, HE FEELS LEADERS ARE WILLING TO

DISCUSS OPTIONS WITH IEG REPS IN FOREIGN CAPITALS. THE DESIRE FOR PEACE AMONG THE MAJORITY OF ERITREANS MAY PROMOTE ACCEPTANCE OF FEDERATION, RATHER THAN A CONTINUED STRUGGLE FOR INDEPENDENCE. (C) THE IEG OFFICIAL STRESSED THE IMPORTANCE OF THE USG ACTING AS A MEDIATOR, AS WE DID IN THE MID-EAST. HE BELIEVES MUSLIMS AND CHRISTIANS CAN LIVE TOGETHER IN PEACE IN ERITREA. EVEN THOUGH THE ELF RECEIVES WEAPONS AND TRAINING FROM COMMUNIST COUNTRIES, HE DOES NOT THINK AN INDEPENDENT ERITREA WILL BE COMMUNIST. HE BELIEVES ERITREANS ARE BASICALLY PRO-WESTERN.

3. TWO OF ABOVE SOURCES SAID ELF RECEIVED BACKING OF AFRICAN COUNTRIES AT RECENT OAU CONFERENCE. I WOULD APPRECIATE CONFIRMATION OF ANY ELF ACTIVITIES AT OAU CONFERENCE. ONE SOURCE BELIEVES THAT ELF, FOR PUBLICITY REASONS, WILL TRY MAJOR OFFENSIVE IN ERITREA BEFORE UPCOMING ARAB-AFRICAN SUMMIT MEETING.

4. IF FEDERATION OR INDEPENDENCE WILL OCCUR IN NEXT YEAR OR TWO, IT WOULD SEEM PRUDENT FOR USG TO UNOFFICIALLY SURVEY ATTITUDE OF ELF LEADERS TOWARDS USG INSTALLATIONS IN ERITREA. PERRY

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